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ABSTRACT

Cuban Americans as a demographic group have violated many of the normally observed patterns concerning immigrant groups to the United States. Although included under the term "Hispanic," Cuban Americans have had a unique demographic, political, economic, and social history in the United States which has differentiated them from other Hispanic groups. Examination of some of the differentiating factors are presented in this paper so as to better understand this ethnic group's cultural identity. Cuban Americans have been economically successful in comparison to other Hispanic and African American minority groups. Much of this success is built on the traditions of family and community. Significantly, however, Cuban Americans received superior treatment to other immigrant groups and also demographically represented a biased population of educated, older, and experienced people. Cuban Americans had a substantial pre-revolution history in the United States and have had the advantage of close geographical proximity to the Latin world to assist in preservation of their culture. Second generation Cuban Americans are viewing the family differently than their parents, what effects this will have on the Cuban American community which has built so much of its economic success on family intradependence is not yet known. Contains 18 references. (JBJ)

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Running head: CUBAN AMERICANS

The Cuban Americans: Ethnic Exiles

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Abstract

Cuban Americans have had a unique demographic, political, economic, and social history in the United States, which has differentiated them from other hispanic groups. Examination of some of these demographic, political, social, and economic factors will presented in this article so as to better understand this ethnic groups cultural identity.

The Cuban Americans: Ethnic Exiles

Cuban Americans as demographic group have violated many of the normally observed patterns concerning immigrant groups to the United States. Although included under the term "hispanic", Cuban Americans have had a unique demographic, political, economic, and social history in the United States, which has differentiated them from other hispanic groups. Examination of some of these demographic, political, social, and economic factors seems warranted to better understand this ethnic groups cultural identity.

Economically Successful Immigrants

In 1986 Perez reported that in the United States, "there are over one million residents of Cuban origin" (Perez, 1986). The population of Cubans living in the United States before 1959 is estimated not to have exceeded seventy thousand (Perez, 1986). After the 1959 Cuban Revolution, however approximately eight-hundred thousand Cubans migrated to the United States (Perez, 1986).

The population of Cuban Americans has both grown and concentrated in South Florida. Grenier and Stepick (1992) indicate that the metro Miami area now has over one million latins or just over forty-nine percent of the total population. This statistic coupled with the report that, "Cuban Americans constitute seventy percent of the latin population of Miami" (Grenier and Stepick, 1992) reveals the high concentration of

Cuban Americans in Dade County. The pattern of migration of Cuban Americans is primarily therefore a recent phenomenon, just over thirty years old, making the majority of Cuban Americans first generation immigrants. The population is also heavily concentrated in Dade County, Florida.

Although Puerto Rican Americans, are also "concentrated in the highly urbanized northeastern region of the country (Angel & Worobey, 1991) the demographic similarity of Cuban Americans to either Puerto Rican Americans or Mexican Americans groups begins to break down rapidly. Even though these hispanic groups share the same language and many of the same latin cultural traditions they are substantially different socio-economically.

Angel and Worobey (1991) report that the "Cuban are the most like non-hispanic whites" socio-economically of any of the groups. The median family income of Cuban Americans was closer to that of the total United States than any of the other hispanic groups (U.S.= $19.917, Cuban= $18,245, Spanish Origin= $14,712) (Perez, 1986). In addition the percent of Cuban American families below the poverty index was 13.6 percent, as compared with Mexican Americans at 28 percent, and Puerto Rican Americans at 44.4 percent (Angel and Worobey, 1991).

The distribution of income levels is also substantially different for Cuban Americans, than for Mexican American or Puerto Rican American groups. The Cuban Americans have more families reporting middle and high income levels, being the only group with more than fifty percent of families indicating "high"

levels of income (Angel and Worobey, 1991). Diaz-Briquest (1982) indicates, that in terms of business ownership, "Mexican ownership rates are over 50 percent lower than they are for Cubans, but almost twice as high as they are for Puerto Ricans" and that, "Gross receipts per firm are about 30 percent higher in Cuban-owned firms" in comparison with other hispanic groups and African Americans. Finally, Perez (1986) reports, "The median income of married-couple families with own children under six years of age is actually higher among Cubans than it is in the total U.S. population."

How have first generation Cuban American immigrants become according to Perez (1986), "the modern prototypes of the economically-successful immigrant, examples that the American dream of upward mobility and economic prosperity is alive and well among today's immigrants." To understand the Cuban economic success we have to look at the history and social patterns of the group in this country along with a few more crucial demographic factors.

Cuban Presence In The United States Prior To 1959

"Contrary to popular perception, the Cuban experience in the United States is not an exclusively post 1959 phenomenon. Cubans have resided in the United States since the 1820's, and well defined and integrated communities emerged during the 1870's" (Poyo, 1989). In all the number of Cuban immigrants between 1871-1958 equals approximately 221,505 (Perez, 1986). Due to political problems in Cuba and European tariff restrictions the 1850's saw

the establishment of the Cuban cigar industry in the United States. Communities of Cuban cigar makers began in West New York, New Orleans, and Key West. It was in Key West that Poyo (1989) reports, "by 1885 almost 100 Key West cigar factories of various sizes employed some 3,000 workers. At the end of the 1880's, Key West produced some 100 million cigars annually."

Tampa would become the true center of the Cuban cigar industry and the largest Cuban community in the United States within ten years after the first cigar factory was established there by Martinez Ybor in 1886. The population of Tampa would grow to more than 20,000 in that first decade of manufacturing (Poyo, 1989). Nationalist politics permeated the Ybor City community, and Cubans were more concerned with the freedom of Cuba from Spain than with the politics of the society around them. Nationalist labor organizations and an exile press existed to feed the communities interest in political developments in Cuba.

The labor organizations protected the employment interests of the cigar workers but also participated in rallying support for Cuba against Spain. These labor organizations were ahead of their time, and it was not until the 1950's that more apolitical American labor organizations move into Florida.

About the Cubans nationalist focus Poyo (1989) writes,

> "So intense was the nationalist sentiment among Cubans in the United States that it dissipated only slowly after the termination of the war with Spain in 1898. Cubans who had participated in the struggle and remained abroad continued to identify with their

> homeland after it had become a republic. The important role of the emigre communities in cultivating nationalist thought and promoting the insurrection assumed legendary proportions as the history of the Cuban insurrection was written."

It would seem that even prior to the 1959 revolution that Cuban immigrants to the United States have had a long history of activism, labor organization, and nationalist Cuban political focus.

Cuban immigrants are not of a single skin color. In fact Greenbaum (1990) reports that Afro-Cubans, "representing 13 percent of Cuban immigrants arriving during the early decades of the century and some 5 percent of the post 1959 emigration" were a small but significant Cuban subgroup. The majority of the Afro-Cubans settled in and remain in Ybor City (Miami's Little Havana is more than 99 percent white (Greenbaum, 1990)) their chief occupation being cigar making. Until the 1896, Supreme Court decision, Plessy vs. Ferguson which set forth the separate but equal doctrine, it was reported that Afro-Cuban immigrants worked and lived with Cuban whites and other immigrant whites side by side.

Greenbaum (1990) indicates a tragic social split which followed as a result of the Plessy vs. Ferguson ruling and subsequent Jim Crow laws,

> "One consequence of these changes was that black and white Cubans were increasingly disassociated from each other. Until 1898, cubans had devoted much of their leisure time and organizational energies to the patriotic clubs, many of which were racially mixed. Patriotic clubs disappeared with the end of the war. In

1899 and 1900 cubans established two new organizations in Tampa- one white, the other black."

Afro-Cubans became a community within themselves primary centered around -La Union Marti-Maceo, a multipurpose organization that served formal and informal social functions. Contact with and especially marriage to African Americans was strongly discouraged. African Americans were not allowed to join La Union Marti-Maceo. Travel between the United States and Cuba by Afro-Cubans reinforced their language and cultural differences from African Americans thereby lessening the chances of assimilation into the larger black community. The cigar industry eventually died out in Ybor City and many of the Afro-Cubans moved to larger cities to find work. Greenbaum (1990) writes, " Between 1930 and 1940, the foreign born black population of Tampa declined by more than half (from 631 to 311)."

Little has been written about Cuban American history prior to 1959. One reason this might be is that Cubans have been focused on Cuba, first as nationalist agitators and later as revolutionary exiles. A second reason might also be that the recent waves of emigration are so dramatic and new social scientists and historians have focused on them, instead of the historical but less presently significant prior emigrations. Very little is also written about the racial make-up of the Cuban immigrants. Cuba is a multi-racial country but the fact that a sizeable minority of cuban immigrants prior to 1959 were black seems to be largely ignored in the literature.

Self-Exile And Settlement After The 1959 Revolution

The Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1959 against Batista spurred the waves of Cuban immigrants which would come to the United States. Wiarda and Harvey (1985) write that Cuba was, "developing slowly as a dependent capitalist country, in which wealth was not evenly distributed but in which middle sectors and a substantial portion of the working class had made social gains." Initially, large sectors of the urban middle class supported Castro against Batista but later sought to leave the country as the revolution became more radical and oriented itself to Marxist doctrine. In order to consolidate his power Castro undertook socialist reforms such that by 1961, "banking, wholesale trade, and foreign trade had been fully collectivized, as was 85 percent of all industry and 80 percent of the construction industry" (Wiarda and Harvey, 1985). It was the radical economic reform measures of the Castro government which drove the Cuban middle class to the United States.

The immigration of Cuban Americans has been characterized in successive waves. The first wave to of Cuban Americans to the United States began in 1959 and went approximately to 1962. The immigrants did not come seeking economic benefits or permanent settlement. Cuban Americans came as self-exiled political refugees, as late as 1973, 60 percent of the Cuban immigrants indicated that they planned on returning to Cuba (Portes, 1984). Many of these 215,000 Cubans in the first wave had been "industrialist, wealthy land owners, manufacturers,

professionals, and managers of trade enterprises" (Portes & Bach, 1985). Perez (1986) writes, "during the early 1960's Cuba's upper socioeconomic sectors, those most likely to be alienated by Cuba's swift transformation into a socialist state, were over represented in the exodus."

The second great wave of Cuban American immigration occurred following the Cuban missile crises between 1965 and 1973. An airlift was organized between the Cuban and American governments and during this time 340,000 refugees immigrated. The demographic profile of this group was still unrepresentative of the Cuban population, "with educational and occupational attainments" (Portes & Bach, 1985) higher than the Cuban population average. Among this group according to Perez (1986), "12.5 percent had completed four or more years of college, a level attained by less than 1 percent of the Cuban population as a whole."

The Cuban alignment with the Soviet Union created hostile political relations between Cuban and the United States. The United States therefore viewed the Cuban immigrants as "political exiles" and welcomed them. This period in Cuban immigration is sometimes called the "golden exile" because the American government provided support for immigrants in finding employment, housing, and capital for starting business enterprises. The vast majority of these immigrants were admitted without visas and moved directly into the Miami community. Later a re-location program was initiated by the Federal government to take some of the burden of the large number of immigrants from South Florida

government. The federal government provided these re-locators with subsidies and housing assistance until they found employment in their new areas.

Cuban immigration between 1973 and 1980 were small numbering less than 3000 a year. In 1980, however, a boatlift from the port of Mariel in Cuba brought some 124,769 new immigrants to the United States (Portes & Bach, 1985). This group was not as warmly welcomed as the previous waves, changed economic climate in the United States and the fact that this group was more demographically representative of the Cuban population (younger and less educated) fostered strong anti-immigrant feelings within and outside of the Cuban American community. The Cuban enclave in Miami had been firmly established by this time however and many of these immigrants found sponsors with over 62,000 being directly released into the Miami community (Portes, 1986).

After understanding the pattern of three major post-revolution waves of immigration, what demographically can be observed about the Cuban American population. These demographics might help to answer the question regarding their economic success. First, they are much better educated than most other hispanic immigrants. Fagen, Brody, & O'Leary, T.J. (1968) report that, over 31% of the first wave immigrants in 1960 were college graduates. Cuban Americans came to the United States with education and skills. Second, the average age of Cuban Americans is significantly higher than other hispanic groups. The median age of Cuban Americans is approximately 37.7 years, the median

age of other hispanic groups is 22.0 years (Based on 1980 census data as reported in Perez, 1986). Older people are more likely to be viewed as stable and have more experience than younger people, hence they are perceived as a better loan applicant by banks and other financial institutions such as the small business administration. Third, the ratio of elderly and women is disproportionate compared with other hispanic groups as men of military age were not allowed to immigrate by the Cuban government. This pattern leads to the establishment of multi-generational households. This multi-generational family pattern creates multiple incomes for the family. The birth rates of the Cuban Americans are also the lowest of the hispanic groups indicating their focus of upward mobility (Perez, 1986). Low birthrates and multi-generational households have freed the Cuban American female population to pursue employment. McAdoo (1993) reports, "that according to the 1980 census 64% of Cuban American women were employed outside of the home." All of these factors combine to assist the Cuban Americans in achieving relative economic success in comparison with other hispanic immigrant groups but perhaps the most important factor must still be examined, the nature of the Cuban enclave in Miami, Florida.

The Enclave - Effects Social, Political, and Economic Life

An ethnic enclave is defined by Portes and Bach (1985) as, "a distinctive economic formation, characterized by the spatial concentration if immigrants who organize a variety of enterprises to serve their own ethnic market and the general population."

Miami's Cuban community is regarded as the foremost example in the United States of a true ethnic enclave. (Grenier and Stepick, 1992). Despite the federal governments efforts to re-locate and disperse Cuban immigrants (some 300,232 persons were resettled outside of Florida) many have trickled back to the Miami area. Grenier and Stepick report that, "by 1980, 52 percent of the Cuban American population lived in South Florida."

Miami has become the center of Cuban American life in the United States. Winsberg (1979) writes, "since 1950 the Latin American community of Miami has grown so rapidly in population that it has dramatically affected the residential space of other groups within the city" and that, "major sub-groups (of Latins) are now separated from each other." Currently, in Miami there are definite Cuban American neighborhoods and these are primarily separated on an economic basis. Little Havana is primarily composed of blue collar workers and elderly, whereas Kendal is comprised of young affluent Cuban American professionals.

The social structure of these neighborhoods effects the process of acculturation and assists in the economic progress of the Cuban Americans. Grenier and Stepick (1992) write,

> "The existence of the enclave also has evident implications for the process of acculturation. The completeness of the enclave has the effect of slowing down that process, for it tends to insulate the immigrant from the "dominant" society and culture, allowing for the retention of the culture of origin."

Cuban Americans can if they so desire transact all of their business in Spanish, they can bank, buy a car, or consult with a

lawyer. The Cuban Enclave unlike the African American community is institutionally complete, meaning that much less contact or dependence on the larger society is needed. An example to illustrate this would be for every, "$1000 of construction output, Cuban construction firms buy $254 of materials from other Cuban manufacturing firms" whereas, "Black construction firms buy only $44 of materials from other Black manufacturers" (Wilson & Martin, 1982). Cuban firms not only have significantly higher gross receipts than black owned firms but it is interesting to note that they also have the highest rate of unpaid labor - representing dependence on family members. These examples illustrate the ability of Cuban Americans in the enclave to keep the "balance of trade", that is the amount of money coming into the community and staying in the community favorable to themselves.

The enclave also promotes retention of Cuban culture. Mohl (1985) reports, "Cubans have held tenaciously to the old-county cuisine." and "An active literary and artistic tradition prevails in Cuban Miami, as does the Cuban musical heritage. Festivals, carnivals, parades, and the like are a common event in Little Havana. Colorful Latin architectural and building styles have sprouted.." The establishment of a strong independent Cuban American community in Miami which is in geographic proximity to the rest of Latin America has provided Cuban Americans with a safe harbor to develop economically and retain their cultural heritage.

In addition to the effects of the enclave on the acculturation of Cuban Americans their politics have had a substantial effect. Unlike, other hispanic groups Cuban Americans are very conservative and overwhelmingly Republican in their political party affiliations. An example would be attitudes that toward policing were similar between middle class Cuban American and white middle class neighborhoods (Alpert & Dunham, 1988). These attitudes reflected a stress on the service functions of the police instead of the law enforcement functions. Police were viewed as necessary and essential to maintain social order.

The focus of Cuban American politics (until very recently) has always been on the overthrow of Castro and return to Cuba. Grenier and Stepick (1992) refer to this as the Cuban American communities exile ideology. This ideology has been strongly socially promoted dissenters have been ostracized by the community. Acculturation is effected because stress is given to foreign concerns instead of adaption to the host society. The existence of the enclave has allowed the political exile-ideology to survive. The intertwining of these factors has served to make the acculturation of the Cuban American community a very slow phenomena. A case could even be made that Cuban Americans have changed the culture of South Florida more than they have adapted to the surrounding culture.

Current Trends and Conclusion

Intergenerational change is beginning to happen in the Cuban American community but only very recently. One must remember that

the majority of Cuban Americans are still first generation immigrants. Grenier and Stepick (1992) write, "Young professionals have the credentials to break away from the enclave and obtain employment in the larger firms and institutions outside of the ethnic community." The Cuban American community is moving from a first generation entrepreneur to a second generation professional community. These second generation Cuban Americans are more interested in political participation and recently have been elected to several political offices on the state and national level.

Kurtines and Miranda (1980) indicate that this change is not without social ramifications, "Cuban American college students indicate a significant decline in the high esteem parental roles traditionally given Latin parents." Second, generation Cuban Americans are viewing the family differently than their parents, what effects this will have on the Cuban American community which has built so much of its economic success on family intra-dependence is not yet known. It is ironic to note that Bercerra, Karno, & Escobar (1982) stress the use of family intervention methods based on the strength of the Cuban American family in the mental health treatment.

Cuban Americans are an ethnic minority which has been economically successful in comparison to other hispanic and African American minority groups. Much of this success is built on the traditions of family and community. Significantly, however Cuban Americans received superior treatment to other immigrant

groups and also demographically represented a biased population of educated, older, and experienced people. Cuban Americans have had a substantial pre-revolution history in the United States and have had the advantage of close geographical proximity to the Latin world to assist in preservation of their culture.

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